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NOTE.—This column is occupied every day by an article reflecting the policies, principles, and opinions of this House of Business upon various points of public interest. SELDRIDGE & CO., LTD.

The Unbroken Chain.

By **CALLISTHENES.**

There recently appeared a Selridge advertisement which showed various spaces filled with drawings and printed descriptions of fashionable wear. Each of these rectangular spaces was representative of a department of the Store, and the artist had linked it to its neighbours by strong links of steel.

It was a pretty idea for an advertisement. I, Callisthenes, having had no hand in the producing of it, may perhaps be permitted to eulogise it decorously.

It was an allegory in printer's ink. You will probably, if you have learnt the value of keeping a watchful eye on all Selridge's advertisements, have seen it yourself and have profited by a careful consideration of the goods advertised in this ingenious manner.

However, it is not my present purpose to dwell on the economic

THE POWERS AND THE BALKANS.

NOTHING is to be regarded as certain in Balkan politics until it is actually accomplished, but there is strong probability that the new Greek Cabinet will be content with a waiting attitude. The Government, says a Reuter message, "awaits" the development of events in the Balkans, in the meantime "maintaining armed neutrality, from which it will only emerge if high national interests compel it to do so." It is semi-officially announced, says another telegram from the same source, that "there is absolutely no foundation for the statement that the new Cabinet intends to formulate another protest against the landing of the troops at Salonica." We may infer from this what is meant when it is said that M. ZAIMIS will pursue a "purely Hellenic policy." He will not commit himself to any steps which might bring Greece into the world war, but by maintaining the mobilisation of the Greek army he remains on guard for Greek interests, in case events should compel him to take action in their defence. M. VENIZELOS's interpretation of Greek interests included the maintenance of the Greco-Serbian Treaty, even if that should bring him into collision with Bulgaria, and if other bayonets should be found behind Bulgarian. What view M. ZAIMIS may take of that Treaty we have at present no means of knowing, but apparently all correspondents in Athens are agreed that he will not obstruct the effort of the Allies to bring succour to Serbia. We do not know what view is taken at Athens of coming events in the Balkans. Possibly it is thought that the Germans will content themselves with trying to force the waterway of the Danube, and that King FERDINAND will be instructed to defer his claims till the end of the war, in so far, at all events, as they would constitute a direct menace to Greece. It is, of course, for the Greeks, and no one else, to say what constitutes a Greek interest, but to M. VENIZELOS it was vital that the Bulgarians should not be allowed to isolate the Nish-Uskub-Salonica railway; and this, it is now definitely stated, is part of the price paid to King FERDINAND for his support of the German cause.

We say "definitely stated" because we have in this morning's papers a summary of the remarkable document distributed to Bulgarian municipalities by King FERDINAND's Government, and republished in full by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. "It can be said with certainty," runs this communication, "that Austria and Germany, in return for Bulgaria's neutrality, promise, first, the whole of Macedonia, including Uskub, Monastir, Ochrida, &c., and, secondly, 'friendly negotiation between Bulgaria and Turkey with a view to the cession of the line to Dedegatch and of the territory to the west of and on the right bank of the Maritza.' Thus the whole of Macedonia, plus the concessions from the Turks, was to be the price of neutrality alone. It is therefore made known to the Greeks that even if King FERDINAND does not strike a blow, his territory is to be enlarged to this extent, supposing the German Powers win the war. The price was still higher for 'military assistance.' The document continues:

Still more far-reaching territorial promises at the expense of Serbia have been made by the Central Powers if we give them our military assistance. These promises correspond to our desire to have a common frontier with Austria-Hungary along the Danube. Other parts of Old Serbia, too, are offered us.

King FERDINAND, clearly, was not content with the traditional thirty pieces of silver. So Germany threw everything into the pot, New Serbia, Old Serbia, even Austrian possessions, until the King saw himself enlarged into a full-blown Emperor, with the "Bulgarian Empire" (the expression is used) marching with the frontiers of the other great Empires, and its Sovereign a potentate of the first magnitude.

We do not know what purpose is served by the publication of this document in Germany at the present moment, unless it is desired to let the world see to what fantastic lengths the German Powers were prepared to go to purchase Bulgarian adhesion, and at the same time to warn the other Balkan States what is in store for them, if they connive at these proceedings. But now, with this information before us, we may reasonably ask the critics and scapegoat-hunters, who, *more suo*, are turning round upon the Foreign Office, what they think it ought to have done or could have done to counter the Germans in dealing with a man who was

accessible to these blandishments, and who, moreover, as the document states, thought that "victory was inclining to the German States." Clearly it was quite impossible to outbid the German offer. With their habitual cynicism, the Germans were prepared to offer anything, and, since the greater part of their offerings were at the expense of their enemies, the operation, on paper, was ridiculously easy. We, on the contrary, could only offer the possessions of our friends, and, if we had compelled them to make vital concessions, we should have been in the mortifying position of finding ourselves immediately outbid by a more dazzling German proposal. On this line of country we should merely have played up to King FERDINAND, who clearly desired to get us wrong with our friends, while he himself remained free to close with the Germans. We had honourable engagements which made it impossible for us to enter into this competition with any prospect of success. There is no way of dealing with King FERDINAND except by proving to him that he plays these games at his own peril, and the one advantage that we get from his frank declaration of hostility is that we now have the opportunity of furnishing this proof. Let us endeavour to do it in a manner which will both go home to him and give our friends in the Balkans the assurances that they need in regard to their own safety.

We cannot conceive any moment less opportune for quarrelling about what we might have done. The situation we are faced with requires us above all things to show that we accept the failure to conciliate King FERDINAND with composure, and are ready to go ahead without wavering on the alternative line. The *Times* this morning takes us to task for saying that the questions which they put to our Foreign Office might with equal justice be put to the Foreign Offices of France, Russia, and Italy. That is the simple truth, and because no full disclosures could be made without opening the archives of all these Powers, it is contrary to public policy to start recriminations at the present time. We should like to think that we had a unique position in the Balkans, but it is a position shared by at least one of the other Powers, and it has never been possible for us to take sole charge of a policy which affected the interests of our allies as vitally as it affected our own. We have no complaints to make against any of our allies—they have worked loyally with us throughout—but an attack on our Foreign Office, as if it were solely responsible, is clearly beside the mark.

THE PAPER MAN.

By **ALGERNON BLACKWOOD.**

Dimble was not too proud to fight, but he was too old, too stiff, too blind; he could not drill properly because he really had to think a moment before he knew which was his left and which his right. There are some men who can positively do nothing; he was one of them. With the best intentions in the world, burning, zealous intentions too, he was yet useless. Unable to help, he lost that comfort which comes the moment one's smaller burden is merged in the collective burden of the nation. That peace being denied him, his interest in the war on the other hand being intense, he merely—read. Morning, noon, and night, he read. He read all the papers, but on Sunday he read only four, not counting "extras." Sunday was his day off.

He plunged with the ease of a bird from the heights of optimism to the depths of pessimism. It wore him out. He believed everything he read. Every move made on the great chess-board was a clever trap into which either the enemy or the Allies would march blind-eyed. He yearned to warn the latter. In time, however, the "trap" idea collapsed; it never came off; the lure was non-existent. A certain paper declared that the enemy would never be caught without its glasses. . . . he gave up buying it for a week, then surreptitiously went back to it because it proved that the Germans were using their last reserves. A bad communiqué could keep him awake at night, so could a very good one. . . .

From the Eastern and Western fronts, at length, he switched off upon the Balkans, till he became so entangled that he—well, though his walls were covered with maps, he never could remember even whether Roumania was north of Bulgaria, or vice versa. In—nor which country claimed Bucharest or Sofia as its capital. Invariably he had to inspect his maps. . . . to Bulgaria; sometimes, judging by the telegrams, it did, sometimes, judging by the articles, it didn't. The Balkans became a gigantic jig-saw puzzle, all corners and curves and points and angles that would not fit. The coloured flags pricked his fingers, the maps got stained, the strip of carpet below them grew threadbare.

For a time he confined himself to picture-papers, till he read that most of the scenes were made somewhere in Surrey, or taken from manoeuvres of five years ago. He flung himself next upon

The chain is broken, and the purpose for which the Store stands is wrecked.

Herein lies the great value of the department-store to the public:—Selridge's is much more than a hat shop plus a boot shop plus a greengrocer's plus all the rest of the departments, just as a chain becomes something more than a number of metal links when the ship it holds rides safely at its anchorage.

And in these times of political (and therefore commercial) stress, it is no easy matter to keep the chain of departments taut and true, each as good as the other in the quality and variety of the merchandise it offers to the public.

Yet there can be no excuse for a severance. When the big pull comes, the test is at hand.

Looking back over the last fifteen months of trading, it may fairly be said of this House that it has stood the test, as it must be stood, in every direction.

Qui s'excuse s'accuse. One can plead the scarcity of domestic labour, or the excessive price of certain goods, or some other reason for falling behind accustomed standards. But difficulties should only spur us on to find means of overcoming them.

The links must not be allowed to snap. The great chain of departments which comprise (with other features) this House of Business will remain whole and unbroken.

element in it, but to try and translate into words the message which the artist translated into this design of the linked department-spaces.

I suppose, if the advertisement had a title (and so meaningful an idea surely merits the distinction) it would be "Interdependence."

Every link in a chain is dependent on its fellow-links. Each separate piece of metal must take an equal share of the strain. When this is so, something is evolved out of the completeness of the several parts; something we call by another word. When a string of iron links, with an anchor at one end and a ship at the other holds fast and true, each link as sturdy as its neighbour above and below it, a chain is formed. A purpose is achieved. A ship is anchored.

But separate the links, or let one of them disclose a flaw and break. . . . The ship drifts.

So it is with the well-organised department store. Each department must be as good as its fellow departments. It will not do for a customer to have bought, say, his hat at Selridge's, and to have been pleased with his purchase, then to buy his collars, and to be dissatisfied. More damage is done than the mere conducting of a bad bargain. The chain is broken. Selridge's is no longer a "department-store" in the mind of that man. It is only a hat-shop where rubbishy collars are also on sale!

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